

Introduction

Melville's Inhumanities

By the sentence of the angels, by the decree of the saints, we anathematize, cut off, curse and execrate Baruch Spinoza, in the presence of these sacred books with the six hundred and thirteen precepts which are written therein, with the anathema wherewith Joshua anathematized Jericho; with the cursing wherewith Elisha cursed the children; and with all the cursings which are written in the Book of the Law: cursed be he by day, and cursed by night; cursed when he lieth down, and cursed when he riseth up; cursed when he goeth out, and cursed when he cometh in; the Lord pardon him never; the wrath and fury of the Lord burn upon this man, and bring upon him all the curses which are written in the Book of Law. The Lord blot out his name under heaven. The Lord set him apart for destruction from all the tribes of Israel, with all the curses of the firmament which are written in the Book of this Law ... There shall no man speak to him, no man write to him, no man show him any kindness, no man stay under the same roof with him, no man come nigh him.¹

At the outset of his essay "Spinoza" from the first edition of his *Essays in Criticism* (1865), Matthew Arnold thus cites the vehement condemnation and excommunication of Spinoza by the rabbis of Amsterdam. Commenting on the passage, Arnold writes: "With these amenities, the current compliments of theological parting, the Jews of the Portuguese synagogue at Amsterdam took in 1656 (and not in 1660 as has till now been commonly supposed) their leave of their erring brother, Baruch or Benedict Spinoza. They remained children of Israel, and he became a child of modern Europe."²

In his own edition of Arnold's *Essays*, Herman Melville marks this whole citation, putting a curly bracket and an "X" in the margin next to the final set of curses or, as Arnold then calls them, "amenities." (See Figure 1.) In his related note in the lower margin, Melville surmises: "These 'amenities', are still, (tho now unspoken) in vogue, and even among the atheists." As such, Melville subtly acknowledges that Spinoza – a dangerous heretic in his own time, a figure of the radical enlightenment whose name became synonymous with atheism, and with whom any association

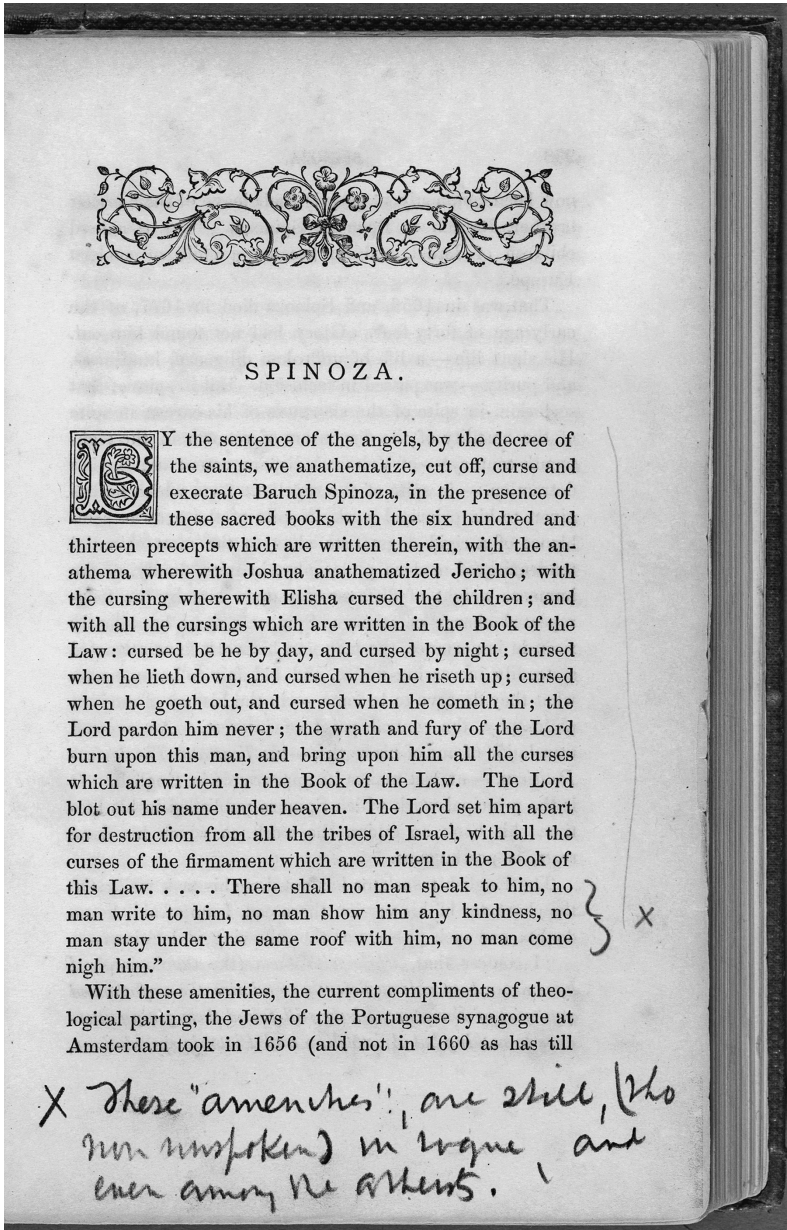


Figure 1 Herman Melville, markings and annotation on Matthew Arnold's essay "Spinoza" from *Essays in Criticism* (1865), *AC85.M4977.Zz865a. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

sparked intellectual controversy – implicitly remained a subversive figure in nineteenth-century thought. Melville is aware that associating with Spinoza is a risky philosophical position, one that might invite condemnation: after all, it is still “in vogue” to hold open a special place of derogation for Spinoza, “even among the atheists.”

Melville had been reading Arnold's essays in the early 1870s as he was preparing his verse-epic *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876). But Melville found in Arnold not only a new stylistic model for his developing role as a poet, but also confirmation, as he had earlier in Goethe's works, of the continued force of Spinoza's thought. Melville would agree with Arnold that, despite the “disparagement and detraction” of Voltaire and Bayle, or the “disfavor cast upon him by the repeated charge of atheism,” Spinoza's importance is still steadily rising; that his “name and work ... bid fair to become what they deserve to become, – in the history of modern philosophy the central point of interest.”³ Arnold's citation of the Amsterdam rabbis' fierce denunciation of Spinoza is thus not the only instance of Melville's marginalia that evinces his incipient interest in – or knowledge of – Spinoza's thought. A little further on, Melville notes that, in the time since Arnold published his essay in 1865, a new English translation of Spinoza's *Ethics* appeared in 1871.⁴ He underlines key Spinozan concepts discussed by Arnold, such as the *conatus*, the *amor intellectualis Dei*, and the joyful and sad passions (Melville marks the lines “Joy is man's passage to a greater perfection ... Sorrow is man's passage to a lesser perfection”).⁵ Melville pays special attention to Arnold's argument concerning what had attracted Goethe to Spinoza: “I mean his denial of final causes, and his stoicism, a stoicism not passive, but active. For a mind like Goethe's – a mind profoundly impartial and passionately aspiring after the science, not of men only, but of universal nature – the popular philosophy, which explains all things by reference to man, and even of certain classes of men, was utterly repulsive” [Melville's underlining].⁶ To bolster his point, Arnold quotes two passages from Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, passages that Melville again marks. Firstly, “God directs nature, according as the universal laws of nature, but not according as the particular laws of human nature require; and so God has regard, not of the human race only, but of entire nature.”⁷ Second, regarding Spinoza's Stoicism, which for Arnold is “as a pendant” to his denial of final causes (in a passage indeed *triple* marked in the margin of Melville's own edition): “*Non studemus, ut natura nobis, sed contra ut nos naturae pareamus* (Our desire is not that nature may obey us, but, on the contrary, that we may obey nature).”⁸ Melville recognized key elements

of Spinoza's philosophy in other works of Arnold, as well, as in the poem "Heine's Grave" from his 1867 *New Poems*:

That was Heine! and we
Myriads who live, who have lived,
What are we all, but a mood,
A single mood, of the life
Of the Being in whom we exist,
Who alone is all things in one. (See Figure 2.)⁹

Next to a large bracket adjacent to these lines from the poem, Melville pencils "Spinoza" thus registering how Arnold, via Heine, reproduces Spinoza's monistic ontology. The infinitude of modes expresses a univocal substance: "the Being in whom we exist/ Who is all things in one."

Marginal markings do not necessarily indicate a reader's philosophical propensities. Nevertheless, they can bring into initial focus the key investments of *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman*, investments shaped by Spinoza's influence on Melville. First, in general terms, we get a glimpse of how Melville approached philosophy as an invested thinker-writer and a creative reader. Like Emerson, Melville was an extensive and eclectic reader of philosophy, even if his reading was often mediated through second-hand sources: Melville reading Arnold reading Spinoza. What is more, it was not in Arnold that Melville had first encountered Spinoza. It is not clear whether Melville had read Spinoza directly, even in the Willis translation of the *Ethics* he cites in his marginal note. But Melville had found him, if indirectly, in a variety of sources such as Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Philosophical Dictionary* (whose chapter on Spinoza is infamously misleading), reference works like the *Penny Cyclopaedia for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*,¹⁰ as well as, perhaps most compellingly for Melville, in Goethe's autobiography, *Poetry and Truth*. In another indicative instance of marginalia, Melville makes a checkmark next to Goethe's comment that Spinoza's "name even at this day, seems to mark the limit of all speculative efforts."¹¹

Second, and more specifically, Spinoza comes to signify for Melville a profoundly nonanthropocentric philosophy, one founded on the resolute inhumanness and impersonality of "God, or Nature." It is a thought, as Melville underlined, "not of men only, but of universal nature," and that does not "explain all things by reference to man, and even of certain classes of men." Rather, as Spinoza writes, we do not seek that "nature may obey us, but, on the contrary, that we may obey nature." This is furthered through Spinoza's denial of final causes, a denial of the Aristotelian

teleological system of nature in which causes (including human agency) are end-directed. For Spinoza, causes are immanent to their effects, such that the infinitude of bodies that comprise modal life are given only to constant movement and new compositions of forces and aggregate bodies. Spinoza therefore understands the human body as a changing collectivity of materials and forces: “The human body is composed of very many individuals of a diverse nature, each of which is highly composite.”¹² The human body, that is, is a composite of different inhuman organic or inorganic bodies – of minerals, microorganisms, elements, affects, energies and forces that have their own imperatives to persevere apart from what we perceive to be our own. The human body is an assemblage of various individuals with their own conatus. The human is thus always already multiple, in process, relational, and, indeed, *inhuman*.

Third, Melville, in ways strikingly akin to Spinoza’s relational ontology, develops his characters as emerging composite bodies or collectivities. In so doing, Melville decouples them from an individual human personhood, such that they serve instead as ciphers for compounds of “transindividual” relations with inhuman and impersonal forces. In some cases, responding to a strain of Romantic pantheism that takes up Spinoza as its philosophical precedent, Melville casts the dissolutions of individuality his characters undergo directly in terms of a “one” permeated by the “all.” This is apparent as early as *Mardi*, in which Melville’s narrator speaks of the “subtle workings of Spinoza’s [soul]”¹³ and has Taji recall “the Jew that rejected the Talmud, and his all-permeating principle, to which Goethe and others have subscribed” (*M*, 176).¹⁴ It is memorably rearticulated in an 1851 letter to Hawthorne in which Melville discusses his flirtation with Goethe’s “all feeling.” In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael whimsically evinces from the severed head of a Sperm whale that it must have been a reader of Plato who’d taken to Spinoza in his latter years due to its “speculative indifference as to death”; he describes how “sunken-eyed” idealists staring from the masthead at the Pacific can become lost in ontological reveries.¹⁵

Yet, as I will argue in Chapter 1, Spinoza’s relational ontology also informs *Moby-Dick*’s manifold inquiries of composite bodies and immanent forms of materiality in terms of more nuanced interweavings of matter and affect. Neither human characters nor whales are presented as discrete individuals who move through a setting, but are given to persistent processes of instantiating transindividual relations. In turn, Melville’s engagement with Spinoza’s “all-permeating principle” becomes further complicated in *Pierre*, as I will examine in Chapter 2. This might seem strange insofar as Spinoza and Goethe are caricatured in passages often

taken to be indicative of Melville's own philosophical position in relation to them, as well as to Platonism and neo-Platonism, German Idealism and Romanticism, and American Transcendentalism – if not to philosophical speculation more generally. *Pierre's* narrator labels Spinoza as among a philosophical procession of “self-imposters” and casts Pierre's childhood friend and latter-day Spinozist, Charles Millthorpe, as one of the “seedy-coated Apostles” in New York City ambitiously “pursuing some crude, transcendental Philosophy.”¹⁶ Or, as Millthorpe himself boasts: “Why, lad, I have received propositions from the Editors of the Spinozaist to contribute a weekly column to their paper, and you know how very few can understand the Spinozaist; nothing is admitted there but the Ultimate Transcendentals” (*P*, 280). But given the disparate set of philosophical voices ventriloquized in the novel, it would be too hasty to ascribe any one of them as Melville's own position. We might rather think of *Pierre* as a multifarious literary experiment with the varieties of Spinozist experience, from a series of “inhuman transformations”¹⁷ that blur categorical distinctions between humans and stones, to the drama of sad passions in which Pierre's affinities to the Spinozistic/pantheistic “all feeling” are tested through a series of destructive encounters. Melville's exploration of Spinozism continues in his later work, from his development in *Clarel* of a strikingly nonanthropocentric poetic philosophy in which Spinoza is recast as “Pan's Atheist,”¹⁸ to late poems such as “Venice” or “The Parthenon” in which Spinoza reemerges as a cipher for the monistic expression of substance or for a vital materialist force of nonhuman agency as a “Pantheist energy of will.”¹⁹ It perhaps culminates in the dissolutions of individuality and impulsive compositions of forces Melville renders in *Billy Budd*. Indeed much of Melville's late work seems scrawled across Spinoza's “starry brow” (2.22.110).

Lastly, the “subversive genealogy” of Spinoza's nonanthropocentric, relational philosophy, as it becomes legible to Melville via Goethe, Arnold and others, inflects Melville's representations of materiality and, in turn, animates his incipient inhuman politics. *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman* thus offers a reading of Melville as positioned at the intersection of the material and the political. Central to this is how Melville reveals the two to be engaged ontologically, and not merely analogically. To pose questions about human political relations, Melville turns to their inhuman qualities and physical and material relations. Melville's materialist political ontology might be thought of in terms of the concept of “transindividuality” which Étienne Balibar, adapting the term from Gilbert Simondon, develops in his reading of Spinoza. Balibar asserts that Spinoza “discovered

that it is impossible strictly speaking to have a strong notion of singularity without at the same time having a notion of the interaction and interdependence of individuals.”²⁰ Yet the transindividual does not just repeat traditional part/whole or individual/collective antinomies. Instead, it proposes a complex ontology of relations that interweaves incomplete and ongoing processes of individuation, multiple causalities, and plural temporalities.²¹ The transindividual relations Melville charts do not respect the boundaries of discrete individualities or bodies, but rather become manifest through material flows, in tenuous corporeities, and across dynamic terraqueous milieus. Melville’s politics of the inhuman becomes realized through these transindividual relations. It is a politics of encounters and exchanges, of immersions and entanglements. It is a politics of the materiality of embodiment, and of indeterminate processes of disintegration. It is a politics of mutual becomings and collective strivings to persevere.

Given the heterogeneous yet, mutual striving of Melville’s human and nonhuman figures, it is not surprising that many recent theorists, especially those in who locate themselves in the Spinozan–Deleuzian conceptual lineage, have unfolded through Melville’s work a politics of the “common.” Following Deleuze’s influential essay “Bartleby; or the Formula,” Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and Cesare Casarino (among others) have invoked Melville’s characters as modeling the common²² as the inventive, nonhomogenizing activity of producing not a community of individuals who group themselves along the lines of a unified identity, but a “composition of singularities in a common relationship.”²³ The common becomes distanced from any nostalgic *Gemeinschaft* whose constitution is based on a continual reinscription of timeless mythoi into its own self-identity. Like Balibar’s transindividuality, the common is based not on individuals who share identities (of which the nation-state is the prime example) but on transindividual singularities who enact an indeterminate, processual sharing of differences. The constitution of the common presupposes active, open-ended cooperation as its logical condition of possibility and at once its outcome. Thus, the heterotopic collective of desubjectified subjects aboard *The Pequod*, departicularized Bartleby or, as I will add, the riotocrats and pirate-utopians of the “The Encantadas,” could serve as conceptual personae for thinking the common. Further, Roberto Esposito posits a politics severed from the “idolatry of the person” and the governing distinctions between the human and the inhuman. In his *Third Person*, Esposito detects a “becoming-animal” at the center of the impersonal that constellates “completely heterogeneous terms – like a human being,

animal, and micro-organism.”²⁴ The impersonal comes into contact with the inhuman, one example of which is how Melville “insinuates the foreign, even inhuman language of the whale into English.”²⁵ Thus Melville’s characters, as they are shorn of identities of nation, class, race, personhood, or even humanness, enter into new configurations of inhuman and impersonal political bodies. As I will unfold in greater depth in the text that follows, Melville’s politics of the inhuman becomes realized variously across his corpus: in what I will call *Moby-Dick’s* “ethopolitics,” *Pierre’s* material-affective relationality, “The Encantadas’” outlandish politics, *The Confidence Man’s* misanthropology, or his later poetry’s politics of dissolution and disappearance.

Despite the persistence of Spinoza’s thought for Melville as both an ontological and metaphorical *point de capiton*, Melville is by no means a straightforward Spinozist. His encounter with Spinoza, of course, is just one of the many philosophical encounters into which his writing enters. Throughout *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman*, I reconfigure his work as a series of such encounters, from his meditations on indigeneity after Rousseau in *Typee*; his cartography of neo-Platonic forms across the seascapes of *Mardi*; the creative use of Cartesian vortices of *Moby-Dick*; his repurposing of Goethe, Carlyle, or German Idealism in *Pierre*; his rewriting of Darwin in “The Encantadas”; his satirical countering of Emerson and reanimation of Cynicism in *The Confidence-Man*; his relation to Hegel in *Clarel*, all the way to his late interest in Schopenhauer in *Billy Budd*. One of the broad tasks of this book is to offer detailed examinations of how Melville responds to, reanimates, if not recreates his philosophical precursors. As such, I will often unfold my arguments through the open-ended *agon* of the bibliographic and the philosophical, taking a keen interest in Melville’s reading, but also endeavoring to put it into its wider literary, intellectual, historical, or political contexts. One of the difficulties but also one of the joys of reading Melville is to find his writing as enmeshed in networks of reference and concepts, networks that point less to an anxiety of influence than to an excess of influence. Given the relational form of his thinking-writing, Melville stages a series of asystematic, dialogical, or even conflicting politico-philosophical positions and imaginative trajectories. But the often-quiet presence of Spinoza, as if standing just offstage behind the ontological curtain, and far from functioning in any exclusionary way, rather shapes the radical complementarity of Melville’s thought. Schopenhauer’s assertion, in a passage marked by Melville in his copy of *World as Will and Idea*, could therefore serve as an axiom for his thinking: “For opposites throw light upon each other, and

the day at once reveals both itself and the night, as Spinoza admirably remarks.”²⁶

Character and the Inhuman

But if the acutest sage be often at his wits' end to understand living character, shall those who are not sages expect to run and read character in those mere phantoms which flit along the page like shadows along a wall? Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man*²⁷

The passages Melville marks in Arnold's "Spinoza" can provide a provisional point of entry into the key philosophical question this book will engage: namely, how Melville draws on Spinoza's radically nonanthropocentric relational ontology to dramatize his own politics of the inhuman. In what follows, however, my enquiries into the politics of the inhuman in Melville's work often take as their initial premise that, for him, literary "character" is not about the development of a fictional individual's personal interiority or subjectivity. Rather, from Ahab to Bartleby, or Isabel to Billy Budd, Melville's characters seem unmoored from personhood, cast into the "whelming sea" of the impersonal or the inhuman (*Clarel*, 4.35.33). For Melville, character is not the site of the suturing of the affective to the embodied, but a process of entering into material-affective relationships that do not abide by interior–exterior, subject–object, human–inhuman, person–thing, or even immaterial–material distinctions. Melville's idea of character, then, fundamentally differs from German Romantic ideas such as those of Friedrich Schlegel, for whom characterization is a presentation of the development [*Bildung*] of the passions of an individual,²⁸ or, similarly, from that of Hegel who, in his *Aesthetics*, shows how world-historical subjectivity unfolds through the pathos of the individual character's person.²⁹ Melville would also depart from other novelists such as Henry James. As James writes in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, the "germ of his idea" did not begin with "any flash, upon the fancy, of a set of relations, or in any one of those situations that, by a logic of their own, immediately fall, for the fabulist, into movement, into a march or a rush, a patter of quick step; but altogether in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a 'subject,' certainly of a setting, were need to be superadded."³⁰ James, at least in this instance, by finding ways to "superadd" the elements of a "subject," reorganizes inhuman imperatives or contingencies to fit a centralizing "single" human character, no matter how nuanced, attenuated or diminutive his representations of the character's consciousness become.

Melville instead suggests a motion away from form or subject, as in the exemplary case of the “original” character in *The Confidence-Man* whose characteristics are “raying away” or becoming externalized (*CM*, 239). More generally across his work, and especially from *Moby-Dick* forward, he does not individuate characters as a subject or form, but rather as constituted and deconstituted by inhuman forces or driven by inhuman imperatives. Character as a set of compositions and differentials, or as Claire Colebrook asserts, the capturing of “a singular encounter of forces.”³¹ Character as a process of morphogenesis. Character as the dynamic site of the suturing of the affective to the embodied, and in turn the point of their mutual dispersal. Character as “developed” through effacement. Character as a flitting phantom. Character as many-sided: as the site of the personified impersonal or inhuman human. Characterology as geology or meteorology: Ahab the wind, Bartleby the wall, Isabel the stone, Oberlus the tortoise, Celio the chemical reaction, Billy Budd the eye of the bull.³²

Melville's characters have prompted many to rethink the categories of the human, the personal, and the individual, so to see them as not only traversed but also indeed construed by various inhuman material forces. As much as this often involves the volatile processes of inherent to the becoming-inhuman of humans, Melville also attunes us to the precarious anthropomorphisms of nonhumans. Behind the notorious becoming-stone of characters like Pierre, Isabel, or Bartleby, that is, we could also recognize a series of stone characters who conversely strive to become human. “Standing face to face” with the marble Demosthenes, as Melville remarks in his reconstructed lecture “Statues of Rome,” “one must say to himself, ‘This is he’” (*PT*, 400).³³ Demosthenes, with his “strong arm, muscular form, the large sinews, all bespeak of the thunderer of Athens who hurled his powerful denunciations at Philip of Macedon”; yet, at the same time, as getting to know him reveals, he is also a man wan and haggard, an advocate perhaps in need of a “glorious course of idleness” to recuperate (400). In Demosthenes – or in the other stone “personages” that populate the lecture (Socrates the “Irish comedian,” Seneca the “disappointed pawnbroker,” and Plato the “modern *valet-de-chambre*”) – Melville stresses, if paradoxically, the “more humane aspects” of the inanimate forms before him (400–1, 404). Demosthenes, as both muscular and haggard, embodies competing human affective imperatives and inhuman trajectories of force. His “expressive marble” might thus recall Melville's figure of the iron man Talus from “The Bell-Tower” who, per the intention of his creator Bannadonna, would have him “possess the power of locomotion, and, along with that, the appearance, at least, of intelligence and will” (*PT*, 400,

177). Yet Talus, an inverse analogue of Demosthenes in Melville's imagination, rather "evinces no personality" (177). If human life is imprisoned in statuary, it is not because the stone constrains this life, but because life is still *in potentia* in the repose of their frozen forms. The Laocoön group, as it had for a generation of Romantic thinkers before him, presents Melville with "the very semblance of a great and powerful man writhing with the inevitable destiny which he cannot throw off" (*PT*, 403–4). The *Venus de Medici* could transform into a Polynesian maiden. Cellini's *Perseus*, "conceived in the fiery brain of the intense artist and brought to perfection as a bronze cast in the midst of flames" could provide the "unalterable mould" for Ahab (*MD*, 108). It is as if Melville wants to discern the inorganic life, or perhaps the human inhumanity, of these creations, to let stone surfaces and sinews twist into arms that can cast Philippics, or writhe in woe; to let ironclad gestures give the appearance of intelligence or agency. Demosthenes the stone stutterer or Talus the metallic murderer thus join the collective of human–inhuman characters that populate Melville's work.

To explore the philosophical and political questions suggested by Melville's human–inhuman characters, this book draws on and diverges from recent work that has dealt with questions of impersonality, posthumanism, and new materialism. Insofar as these theoretical strands have been motivated by the work of Gilles Deleuze, it is useful first to note his conceptualization of how Melville's characters undo the representational coherences that govern personhood or human particularity in the name of the inhuman. For Deleuze, significantly, "the biggest problem haunting Melville's oeuvre" is indeed "reconciling" the inhuman and the human."³⁴ Figures such as Bartleby, Isabel, or Billy Budd thus open a "zone of indetermination or indiscernibility" (*ECC*, 76) in which characters merge with one another and their surroundings; they become atmospheric events or reverberations that pass into affective landscapes. To come to this, Deleuze invokes Melville's original character in *The Confidence-Man* as the epitome of this process of dissociation from fixed human identity. Following Melville's description of the original as a "revolving Drummond light" (*CM*, 239), Deleuze's original "throws a livid white light on his surroundings"; it is "sometimes the immobile source of this light – like the foretopman high up on the mast, Billy Budd the bound, hanged man who 'ascends' with the glimmering of the dawn, or Bartleby standing in the attorney's office – and sometimes its dazzling passage, a movement too rapid for the ordinary eye to follow, the lightning of Ahab or Claggart" (*ECC*, 83). For Deleuze, Melville brings to bear the encounter of characters like Pierre, the Attorney, or Vere with figures of primary nature, Isabel,

Bartleby, or Billy Budd, an encounter that destroys them, leaving them wrecks of reason. Bartleby's formula, Isabel's murmur, or Budd's stutter become figures for a departicularizing motion that emancipates character from human personality into a multiplicity of disordered haecceities.

In the wake of – or separate from – Deleuze's influential work, the manner with which Melville decouples character from personhood has recently received increasing attention. For Sharon Cameron, to take just one example, Melville's characters are likewise unconfined to the personal; they become processes by which personal characteristics become emancipated, or are given over to an excess. In her haunting chapter on Melville in *Impersonality: Seven Essays*, Cameron also draws on the theory of original characters to unfold the implications of the impersonal in *Billy Budd*. As Cameron writes: "[i]n constructing a set of effaced distinctions which are like those that dominate persons but outside of a characterological realm, Melville treats persons as if they were not governed by a set of constraints that differentiate them from other phenomena, as if a person were not different from a stone or a manifestation of light."³⁵ Cameron takes recourse to Melville's late reading of Schopenhauer to elaborate how the "essence" of all personal characteristics is identical to the essence of all phenomena: "the essence of a stone and the essence of a mind are the same (not just the same kind of) thing."³⁶ Schopenhauer's metaphysics is echoed in Melville's movement across categories of materiality and immateriality, stone and mind. This movement is not exactly metaphorical: Budd becomes indifferent from a stone not because of a metaphorical transport, but because all things which are different nonetheless have the same essence. Individuality is "annulled," and characters overflow into one another or into the "circumambient" world.³⁷

I will return to Cameron's reading of *Billy Budd* in my conclusion to consider how Spinoza might have us reorient Schopenhauerian readings of questions volition, individuation, and the inhuman that Melville's last novella raises. Suffice it to say for now that one goal of *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman* is to extend formulations of impersonal character in Cameron's reading of *Billy Budd* (or similarly in Branka Arsić's reading of "Bartleby") across a broader range of Melville's works. In so doing, I will resituate theories of characterological impersonality as part of a complex Spinozist philosophical inheritance that informs Melville's relational, materialist political ontology – as derived, that is, from how Spinoza reads human actions as "lines, planes, or bodies." What is more, the concept of the inhuman that Melville evinces from Spinoza's profoundly nonanthropocentric philosophy also avails his work to approaches

that flatten ontological distinctions among species and types of materiality. Geoffrey Sanborn's "Melville and the Nonhuman" surveys Melville's deep responsiveness to forms of animal and plant life, again eschewing individuality in the name of "a life among others" in which one is "simultaneously individuating oneself and slipping into the vast stream of individuations."³⁸ Matthew Taylor's *Universes Without Us*, although it does not treat Melville, discloses "posthumanist cosmologies" in Poe, Chestnutt, or Hurston in which the human is incorporated in "non-human processes" and human agency is redistributed among "hybrid relations and dynamic human-nonhuman assemblages."³⁹ In so doing Taylor criticizes forms of posthumanist thought that, in depriving the human, inadvertently extend human agency to nonhumans, or erase human agency altogether. Likewise, new and vibrant materialists like Manuel DeLanda, Samantha Frost, Jane Bennett, and Karen Barad have opened new theoretical vistas from which to reconsider Melville's investments into materiality, nonhuman/extended agency, and relational ontology. In particular, I draw on Barad's notion of "entanglement" in the context of *Moby-Dick* to explicate how Melville's relational ontology becomes eventuated through the "intertwined agential performance"⁴⁰ of human and nonhuman actants.

By charting Melville's inhumanities, my approach thus shares much with posthumanism and the new materialism; yet, my characterization of Melville's politics as a politics of the inhuman (rather than of the "non-human" or "posthuman") is not merely a semantic caprice. By focusing on the inhuman as it functions in Melville's writing, that is, I endeavor to interpret his ontologies of matter and relation on their own terms as they creatively reanimate and resist the European philosophical tradition. To this end, my use of "inhuman" follows Melville's own use of the word: from Isabel's "bewildering feeling of the inhumanities" in *Pierre* (*P*, 157) or the Cosmopolitan's reproach of Mark Winsome's thought as an "inhuman philosophy" in *The Confidence-Man*, to scenes of the "inhuman" sea and earth of *Clarel* and *John Marr* (4.10.37–8; 4.13.7; *PP*, 249). Melville figures the inhuman as an inscrutable, if not implacable, collocation of physical forces, agencies, and material processes that might assail the human but nonetheless always already dwell within and act through the human.⁴¹ Admittedly, in Melville's writing, the inhuman sometimes describes acts of cruelty: Melville's misanthropes can certainly be cruel, and one must always be wary of the "inhumanity" of autocratic ship captains. But operative as a concept in Melville's work, the inhuman destabilizes complacent normative determinations of human identity, individuality, or personhood. If human *vanitas* is often his target, Melville not only seeks to

chastise a human-all-too-human humanity. Across the vast seascapes and landscapes of his work, he diagrams an ontology of inhuman forces. As such, I bring Melville into proximity with Elizabeth Grosz's feminist new materialism. Following Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that "humans are made exclusively of inhumanities,"⁴² Grosz explores how nonliving, cosmic forces make possible human affects, sensations, or indeed becomings.⁴³ Grosz develops her inhuman ontology into a "politics of imperceptibility" that runs counter to a Hegelian "politics of recognition."⁴⁴ From another perspective, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in *Stone: Ecology of the Inhuman*, proposes a notion of the inhuman that resonates with Melville's own lithocultural propensities: "I speak of the inhuman to emphasize both difference ('in-' as negative prefix) and intimacy ('in-' as indicator of estranged interiority)."⁴⁵ Grosz and Cohen, if differently, theorize the intensity of human "transformative involvements" with the inhuman, and point to an incipient politics wrought from multifarious and collective endeavors to persevere in an inhuman universe.

Melville's politics of the inhuman, by emphasizing the pluralism of trans-individual relations, remains wary of overly sanguine readings of Spinoza that assert a latter-day monism, and any concomitant annulments of identity into a transcendent oneness. One can merely note how Melville often represents the action of pulling back from losses of individuality into a "pantheistic" whole (Ishmael's warning to sunken-eyed Platonists on the masthead, the hesitation to "live in the all" in his letter to Hawthorne, or the tragic consequences of Pierre's vexed quest for self-renunciation). He instead posits a plural ontology of relations: the archipelago as a nontotalizing form, heterotopic commonalties such as his "plurality of mortals", the "ragged edges" of truth – in short a proto-radical empiricism of disjunctive syntheses and loose confederations. As a disanthropocentrizing but nontotalizing force, the inhuman renaturalizes the human or brings the human into proximity with its multiple estranged interiorities: the inhumanities that dwell within us and from which we are "exclusively" made. If man, as Spinoza notes, might flatter himself to be an "*imperium in imperio*" in the natural world, the inhuman lays siege to his vain citadel. The inhuman is the humility of humanity.

Uncemented Stones: Towards a Poetics and Politics of Relation

Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman is an attempt to register the forms of relation Melville's writing makes perceptible, and to think of them both materially and politically. Melville's writing is composed of

movements and patterns. It is composed of tenuous couplings of rope and flesh and of pressing physical immensities like the Great Pyramid and the dark inhuman sea. Lines form into wrinkled brows and striated charts, and colors into dalliances of atmosphere and light. The singular “stone unhewn” of his poem “On a Natural Monument” from *Battle-Pieces* does not stand apart from the ponderous South Seas stones of *Typee* or the Memnon stone of *Pierre*, from the Bunker Hill Monument in *Israel Potter*, or the piles of stones that dot the barren Judea of his journals and *Clarel*: “The hills. Are stones in the concrete. Regular layers of rock; some amphitheaters disposed in seats, & terraces. The stone walls (loose) seem not the erections of art, but mere natural variations of the stony landscape.”⁴⁶ Melville’s loose stone walls, or rocky topographies of Pacific or Grecian archipelagoes, or for that matter the monkey-rope that binds Ishmael and Queequeg, serve as topologies for collectivities of singularities. Yet the material relations through which Melville relentlessly unfolds his writing – from the lithic to the fleshy, or the atmospheric to the hempen – form part of his nonanthropocentric political ontology. The question Melville asks in *Israel Potter*, “Are not men built into communities just like bricks into a wall?” then emerges as a key political question, as if a human politics could emerge out of a common materiality with an aggregate of stones.⁴⁷

Along these lines, each chapter of *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman* is organized around one or several modes of relation, and how through these modes of relation, Melville develops his materialist political ontology. In Chapter 1, I examine four figures of transformative relationality operative in *Moby-Dick*: namely, concatenation, prosthetics, immanent materiality, and geometrics. First, I explore how Melville’s concatenated figures literalize forms of relationality and transformation as a material and ontological interweaving. I then turn to Ahab (one usually understood as the paragon of ego or personality) to reconsider him in terms of his transindividual, prosthetic relationships with human and inhuman others. Across the novel, what is more, Melville dramatizes an immanent, relational ontology as both human and nonhuman characters are immersed in manifold substances and dynamic material systems. And, as the novel cuts into bodies and creates composites of forces and nexuses of objects, it opens new forms of spatiality that, as I will argue, can be best understood in terms of contemporary nineteenth-century advances in non-Euclidean geometry. As it does so, it points to an “ethopolitics” of partial bodies, of mutual enactments and collective agencies, of material interpenetrations and intersecting and interwoven singularities. In Chapter 2, I turn to

Pierre to unfold further how Melville draws on Spinoza's nonanthropocentric relational ontology, as mediated by Goethe and others, and in terms of the relation between the "all" and "one." As if following the imperative of Goethe to "live in the all," Isabel seeks to be subsumed into an inhuman "allness," but Pierre, as he tries to "live in the all," suffers from a series of destructive encounters. *Pierre* is Melville's novel of sensations, and a novel that probes the relation between materiality and affect. Melville diagrams how invisible forces affect bodies and move through stone and air. To this end, Isabel's pervasive murmur, as what might be called a "liminal sensation," effects a muted yet insistent sonority as it traverses the novel's material forms and affective territories, and seemingly deindividualizes Pierre. Melville figures his inhuman politics through Pierre's material-affective relations and, ultimately, his vexed quest to "live in the all." Far from a failed book of a bitter writer, I contend that *Pierre* is a vital psycho-philosophical – and political – experiment into the legacies of Spinozism.

In Chapter 3, after a brief transitional discussion of *Israel Potter*, I shift focus to Melville's human–inhuman collectivities on the Galápagos archipelago in "The Encantadas, or the Enchanted Isles." The archipelago functions variously as a topography, an ontology of relation, and a method of writing. Parodying Darwin, Melville limns an "alternate taxonomy" of outlandish⁴⁸ animals on the islands, and a set of characters at the threshold of vanishing into its hostile landscapes, into a world both half-formed and always already ruined. Blurred identities materialize into hybrid and grotesque creatures; relations seem elusive if not enchanted. Animal societies and human societies merge into uncertain congeries. Yet the archipelago also functions as a political ontology of relation that disregards human–inhuman distinctions in favor of heterogeneous, departicularized, and heterotopic communalities. In the later sketches, through figures like the hybrid Dog-King or the Hermit Oberlus, Melville dramatizes the potentials and risks of any outlandish revolutionary politics: namely that mutual communal production is always in danger of slipping back into paternal authority, misanthropy, or totalizing identity. The political question Melville comes to ask through "The Encantadas" is: What will separate the communitarian and universal fraternity from their misanthropical counterparts?

In Chapter 4, I expand my discussion of commonality and misanthropy in *Pierre* and "The Encantadas" in the context of Melville's last novel, *The Confidence-Man*. In *The Confidence-Man*, Melville's communitarians are punctuated by a series of complex and many-sided figures of man-hatred.

They put to the test not only Melville's own depictions of commonality, but also recent theorizations of the "common." As a "misanthropology," I argue that Melville figures misanthropy in three interrelated ways. First, as a *misanthrope-ology*, that is, as a performative theory of misanthropy in a series of dialogic exchanges among the shifting set of characters, and drawing on classical and Shakespearian precedents, especially *Timon of Athens*. Second, Melville gives direct political purchase to his theory of misanthropy in the novel's probing of the "metaphysics of Indian hating," in which his *misanthrope-ology* modulates into a *mis-anthropology*. The paradoxical subjectivity of the "genial misanthrope" becomes realized as the "backwoodsman" who uses Christian charity to legitimize violence against Native Americans. Third, Melville's misanthropology in *The Confidence-Man* actively decenters the *Anthropos* as the reference point of the political. That is, by countering Emersonian Transcendentalism and drawing on ancient Cynicism, Melville develops an "inhuman" political philosophy that blurs human/nonhuman boundaries and compels us to rethink the anthropocentric biases of our empathetic investments in nonhuman life.

Chapters 5 and 6 further unfold Melville's inhuman politics through his "poetics of relation." In Chapter 5, I investigate how Melville's characters in *Clarel* become a series of intertwined "personae" who merge with each other, with literary, historical, or Biblical personages, and with the inhuman landscapes of the poem. Melville's characters are deindividuated in *Clarel* in their encounters with the physical spaces and material forces of the Jerusalem cityscape and the sublime wildernesses of the Holy Land. Melville's characters in *Clarel* become stones themselves, if not geological processes of erosion and dispersion. Melville, throughout *Clarel*, searches a complex world of inhuman imperatives. And, in cantos such as "Concerning Hebrews," he again turns to Spinoza to reveal the vanity of seeing the world in "reference to man." Finally, in Chapter 6 I focus on how questions of form, relation, and dissolution become operative in Melville's other poetry. In ways deeply resonant with much of his oeuvre, Melville figures human characters as both individuated and deindividuated by inhuman material forces and landscapes. In *Battle-Pieces*, *John Marr*, *Timoleon*, or *Weeds and Wildings*, he develops an entropic poetics and an ontology of material and affective relations not circumscribed by any anthropocentric *vanitas*: fallen soldiers, shipwrecked mariners, if not entire ancient civilizations seemingly vanish into the inhuman earth and sea. As in "The Encantadas," in *Timoleon*, Melville once again uses the archipelago form to instantiate relationality and dissolution across several

physical, aesthetic, and philosophical registers. In "Rip Van Winkle's Lilac," Melville develops a poetics of aging and of material decay in which growing old and death become transindividual, transformative events of relating with and within the inhuman. As a poetry of monumentalizing and erasure, Melville's later poetry thus archives the mutual dissolutions of forms and of persons. Yet, as it does so, it remains radically open to new forms of interrelation and inhuman transformation, recollection, and renewal. I end the book with a short coda devoted to *Billy Budd* in which, I argue, we can again find Melville close to Spinoza.

Despite the risk that the "amenities" with which those who would denounce Spinoza might continue to be in vogue, Melville variously explores in his writing the liberations and limitations opened by the Spinozist inheritance as he encountered it in nineteenth-century thought. Across this book, I chart how Melville's characters become imbricated in material-affective relationships, undergo metamorphoses into hybrid human-inhuman forms, or become invisible within his landscapes, so to explicate a nonanthropocentric relational thinking.⁴⁹ More of course could be said about works not included in this study, from the early romances *Typee*, *Omoo* or *Mardi*, *Piazza Tales* like "The Piazza" and "Benito Cereno," or the rich mosaics of late poems like *The Burgundy Club*. But if the arc of these chapters, even if not exhaustive, follows the chronology of Melville's publications, the focus rests on the elements and relations, movements and encounters that come alive in Melville's writing. We move away from a hermeneutic geared toward uncovering biographical correspondences (including the prose/poem distinction) that still predetermine responses to his work. It is rather to trace lines and groupings, trajectories and circulations; to let patterns or colorings (even minor or subterranean ones) come to light; or, to follow lines of strata or lines of splintering destratification. It is to find relations among his manifold solitaries and loose stones.

Samuel Beckett, in one of his few comments on Melville, states that despite the fact that there is "too much symbol-chasing going on the States," Melville "still has a lot to say to us."⁵⁰ Finally, this book is an attempt to hear what Melville still has to say to us – in terms of how a rethinking of the extent our relations, of our deeply inhuman condition, might open new potentials for understanding the "world we live in." As Beckett says in *The Unnamable*, "That I am not stone deaf is shown by the sounds that reach me."⁵¹